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PSYCHOLOGY AND CONFESSION.

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The following article contains the substance of the address given at the recent Oxford Conference of Evangelical Churchmen. The general subject of the Conference was "The Ministry of Reconciliation." Dr. Brown was specially invited as an expert on Psychology, to give the Conference the benefit of his valuable experience in the use of Psycho-Analysis.—EDITOR.

I CANNOT imagine a more important subject matter of discourse than this question of psychology and confession. When Mr. Chavasse invited me to speak under this title, I simply could not refuse, because my experience now for many years has convinced me that it really is one of the fundamental problems of psychology as well as of religion. What exactly do we mean by confession? What happens when confession occurs? In speaking to you, I want to say definitely that I am speaking as a psychologist, not necessarily as a philosopher or a theologian. I am speaking entirely from the psychological point of view. Psychology is in a difficult position. It is about to assume very much more power than it at present possesses. Its future is assured. It is like a young adolescent who has a great future before him, but who is, on occasions, over-impressed and over-stimulated by the thought of his future, and is tempted at times to presume upon his future and to anticipate it. That is the danger the psychologist runs at the present day. Another danger is that psychology, because of its importance, will trespass on other domains. As long as psychology keeps its place it has a fundamental work to do. What is the task of psychology? It is the task of bringing scientific order into the temporal sequence of mental processes as observed in individuals. It is, as James Ward said, the science of experience, and experience is always individual experience and is something that goes on in time. Besides that aspect, there is the eternal aspect of experience, the aspect of values, and these values are classified under the headings, the good, the beautiful and the true which, in their essence, are beyond time but not out of time. The eternal is not something which occurs all at once, but something which, in some mysterious way, takes time into itself. We have that occurring in the individual mind. It is not a mystery which has to be accepted without being understood at all. In our ordinary life we are already rising above the immediate present, we are already rising into an eternal sphere, and so for the individual, the life of the eternal is there. I would not dream of making distinctions between the mind and the spirit because I think all mind is spiritual. The distinction I would make is between the events occurring in time and the value of those events. You cannot say they are all of the same level. Psychology has to deal with value, and the determination of value from the

point of view of psychology is not the same as that from the point of view of philosophy and religion.

It is because so many psychologists have no training in philosophy that there is so much confusion in this matter at the present time. The majority of psychologists are untrained in philosophy. They come to the subject from the point of view of mental processes in connection with physical processes (in the brain), and no wonder they tend to explain everything in terms of what has gone before, and treat the mind in the way of a closed system.

To have inspiration means nothing objective to them because they cannot treat objective inspiration scientifically. We carry our science as far as possible, but we don't pre-judge and prejudice the whole situation by giving our own inadequate account of reality. That is obviously the case in the writings of Freud in *The Future of an Illusion*. It is quite easy in that book to discover the original fallacy when you find him referring to reality. He uses the word "reality" in a way no philosopher would. He seems to assume that religion is a mixture of egotism, greed and fear. The way to refute a doctrine like that is to give a more adequate psychological analysis of religious experience and its philosophic implications.

Confession and psycho-analysis.—For years now, people who have approached psycho-analysis and other forms of analytical psychology from the religious side have tended to think of analysis as a development of the practice of confession. Although there are similarities the differences are still greater. The differences are differences of point of view and of purpose. In confession the idea is to get the individual to admit that he has been wrong, to change his mental attitude and to get him to wish to be better and to be ready to make restitution for what he has done wrong. In analysis the purpose is quite a different one. It is to go over the individual's past in order to see how one mental process has led on to another in his life, until the present situation is reached. Psycho-analysis was devised to help patients suffering from nervous and mental symptoms. Confession deals more with normal people than with abnormal people.

But although there is a dividing line, a difference in quality between the normal and pathological, in actual experience there is no complete separation. The most normal person has pathological trends which need to be tracked down and eliminated in a scientific way. The difference in point of view here between confession in religious practice and analysis in psycho-therapy is in the adequate training and education of the normal person. In the case of confession, advice may be given at the end; in the case of analysis, advice is not part of the analysis. Analysis enables the individual to rectify past wrong mental attitudes. Analysis has discovered various mental mechanisms, mental reactions in the face of difficulties of one kind or another that are met with in the course of life. Such mental reactions are the reaction of compensation, the reaction of projection, the reaction of introjection and the reaction of regres-

sion. The process of regression is a process of stepping back to an earlier or more infantile mental attitude towards life. This is apparent in most cases of patients suffering from mental illness.

This process of regression is important for religion because the process can take place in certain instances and produce a religious experience (such as an experience of "conversion") whose true validity is not quite the same as its apparent validity. The individual, if he is allowed to put too much weight upon that unthinkingly and blindly, may be hindering himself in his own true religious development, and he may, in a great emotional experience, be tending to fix himself at an infantile level. Besides regression, the process of compensation is generally admitted to be of frequent occurrence in the life of mental patients. The mind tends to rectify itself in face of a difficulty, but when inadequate to its task it may develop symptoms, i.e. morbid reactions of one kind or another.

Partly by endeavouring not to see one's deficiency, one may run in different directions. Sometimes, one may run to dogmatic agnosticism to escape duties which one does not feel equal to. At other times, one may endeavour to emphasise other abilities one may possess and magnify one's pretended power in those directions to hide from oneself one's religious deficiencies. Analysis is a process of encouraging a patient to talk out his life for an hour at a time without any reference to righting a wrong or confession or absolution, but just letting his feelings come out. That is a very important process, because it enables him to work off repressions that have driven him into this false position. If you make a frontal attack on him you may make him entrench himself in that false position still more firmly, and he may even use religion itself to the further entrenching of himself. In that sense analysis is needed to prepare the way for adequate confession.

I cannot identify confession with analysis. I have had patients for varying periods of analysis; my longest patient was for six years, and they talk at every level of conscious reaction and unconscious reaction. You find mental processes that do get outlet, and if they had not obtained that outlet, they would have produced distorted reactions in the conscious mind which would have continued to mystify the individual and those around him. The normal person, as such, does not need analysis. We only need analysis so long as there is something pathological in us; something which is not adapted in a scientific way to our environment.

When I say I don't distinguish the mind from the spirit, it does not mean that I don't distinguish our mental environment and our spiritual environment. We can make a distinction for any ordinary subject, and we have to choose as we make a distinction between mental illness and moral illness, although they run into one another. Although it is true that analysis is different from confession, I have found in almost every case I have dealt with, that sooner or later my patient has wanted to confess to me. They seem to feel the need for real confession. It is when one gets confession in the process of analysis that one sees the real difference between the two.

Here we must take into account Freud's recent doctrine of the "super-ego." The super-ego is the beginnings of individual conscience, the taking up into the individual mind in early years of parental authority, of parental veto, or the veto of society. We have to allow for that in analysis. It is a further complication. When the patient begins to confess to you, you have to ask yourself: Is this blaming of himself just a mechanical action of his own super-ego, working unconsciously, but with a conscious reflection so that he is blaming himself when he really should not? That can happen. A patient can, in the course of an analysis, begin to say, "Really, I don't deserve to get better. I am rotten to the core."

If he takes that line, one has to go on helping him. If one says, "Yes, you are a miserable sinner, you have to confess," one may be putting too great a load on his shoulders. One may be taking things at their face value which should not be taken at their face value. All psychology which is based on deep analysis emphasises the fact that things are not always what they seem. It is true that many people who do this work seem sometimes in danger of forgetting that there is a conscious mind at all. That is an obvious mistake. The unconscious mind is always working mechanically at the back of the conscious mind, in the form of a blind driving towards instinctive goals, of which the most fundamental are the "will to live" and the "will to power."

The psychologist has to be fully aware of all that while he is listening to his patient. He listens, he does not talk. He tries to get the patient's confidence so that the patient can talk to him, but sooner or later the confession element does come in and the expert psychologist is able to distinguish between the true confession and the pseudo-confession due to the working of this primitive infantile conscience. Ultimately, he has to explain to his patient the difference, so that the patient can gradually unravel it himself. But the patient must not think this is all super-ego, that it is all convention, or what not. He needs to be sustained in his search for an ethical standard, and we find that later on a logical standard comes clear and ultimately a religious standard.

Again, speaking entirely on a basis of observed fact, I find that patients get a deeper view of religion through analysis instead of becoming sceptical of religion.

In analysis, we are dealing with what is in our own individual minds all the time, but when we come to the true confession side, we are passing beyond that. As scientists we feel it is our duty to allow as fully as possible for what has come through our past experience, but we are not justified in denying the possibility of spiritual help and inspiration from a higher source.

To sum up my short address, I would say that, for psychology, deep analysis of every kind is different from confession; but that if deep analysis is adequate, it may ultimately lead to confession, to a need in the individual for absolution and for a reorganising of life in relation to a spiritual universe and in relation to religious experience. I have not yet met a single patient who has ultimately discarded

religion as a result of analysis. They may say at the beginning, "Religion doesn't mean much to me, I have drifted away, I don't seem to need it," but, after a long analysis where they have had to face fundamentals and the deeper metaphysical implications of existence, they admit, without exception, that religion is ultimately the one important thing in life.

The other matter in regard to psychology and confession is that we must always remember the existence of the unconscious mind as well as the existence of the conscious mind.

Finally, you may be wondering what application this has to modern methods of group confession. The conclusion can be drawn from what I have said, except that I have omitted consideration of the factor of transference. It is a transferring of emotional tendencies of early years to the person to whom you confess, or to whom you bare your mind. Transference occurs at once if anything is going to happen at all. It may be positive or it may be negative. If it is positive then the doctor or the physician has a great responsibility on his shoulders. If there is transference in the case of any form of confession, there again, the whole personality of the priest is of the utmost importance. If you have multiple confession you have a complication of the whole situation which may sometimes be helpful, but which may be the reverse. You have uncontrolled transference. One of the things we have to learn in analysis is to know how to control the transference.
